

EXTRACTS
FROM REPORTS OF THE HON. CAPT. OWEN, R. N.
ON THE
PORT OF WHITEHAVEN,
AND OTHER
PORTS AND HARBORS ON THE ATLANTIC COAST OF NOVA SCOTIA,
EASTWARD OF HALIFAX.

(Copy)

COLUMBIA, *Halifax, N. S.*, 5th September, 1846.

SIR,—Your Excellency was pleased to refer to me on the subject of the Ports in the Promontory of Canseau, but as the information I was then (last Wednesday) able to give Your Excellency was verbal, and therefore evanescent, I have presumed it may be more acceptable in an authentic and tangible form.

My attention was directed by His Excellency Sir William Colebrooke to the necessity of making such a nautical reconnaissance of the Coasts of the Promontory of Canseau, as might assure us that there was at that point a safe Port, easy of access, not incommoded by ice at any season, and, in short, such a Port as might with advantage be used as the junction of sea and land communication between Great Britain and her Colonies in North America, &c.

As I had never before visited any of the Ports at that extremity of Nova Scotia, I examined (by actual visitation) Country Harbour, Torbay, Whitehaven, and the Ports of Canseau and Guysboro', and reconnoitred all the intermediate shores.

There are serious nautical objections to the adoption of any of the points mentioned, which are unnecessary to detail in this communication, except only Whitehaven, of which the Admiralty Charts give very good plans. Lieutenant Shortland, Commander of the *Columbia*, surveyed the approaches to Whitehaven, and we gave three days to its examination.

Whitehaven is not only most conveniently situated, being the nearest approachable point of the Continent of North America to England or Ireland, (in lat. $45^{\circ} 10' N.$, long. $61^{\circ} 8' W.$), but is a splendid and most commodious Port, whose immediate entrance and its Harbour are never obstructed or incommoded by drift or packed ice.

It has very great facilities of approach, and has only two out-lying dangers or small rocks between the Port and the open sea, and these only about half a mile from the shore; and, in short, its nautical facilities of attainment greatly exceed those of Halifax, or any other point on this coast that I have seen. The upper parts of its fine and beautiful Harbour (like Bedford Bason and Halifax Harbour,) in some winters freeze over in part, but never so as to obstruct its external communications, its approach, or its perfect safety; and its configuration, as regards the proximate coasts, prevents the accumulation of drift or packed ice, either to obstruct or incommode it.

Its shores offer no impediments to Rail Road termini, wherever convenient, and the vicinity is (in my judgment) perfectly practicable for Rail communica-

tions ; and if the new road from Dartmouth to Guysboro' were continued, it would bring Whitehaven within 120 miles of practical road distance ; and, (as I have understood) on a level so unobstructed as to invite to that direct line of Rail Road to Halifax from Whitehaven, should it be adopted as the sea terminus, and this distance in Rail time requiring less than four hours, saving a voyage of sixteen hours under favorable circumstances ; and considering the inconveniences at present existing to the nautical commodiousness of the Port of Halifax in times of fog, the advantages of the shorter communication must be indefinitely manifest.

Thus, Sir John, I have certified to Your Excellency this one important fact, that at the nearest available point of North America to England or Ireland, there is a splendid Port—(Whitehaven) most conveniently placed, and endowed in every way inviting to its use as the junction of Sea and Rail communication between Great Britain and these Colonies.

I have, &c.

(Signed)

W. F. W. OWEN, Captain, R. N.

His Excellency Sir John Harvey, K. C. B., K. C. H.,
Lieutenant Governor.

Extracts from the Reports of the Hon. Captain Owen, R. N., Marine Surveyor, relative to Whitehaven Harbour, near Cape Canseau, to His Excellency the Lieutenant Governor of New Brunswick.

No. 1.—Extract.

Campo Bello, 11th September, 1846.

SIR,—By Your Excellency's suggestion, and since that, by authority of the Lords of the Admiralty, I proceeded with the Columbia, on the first of last month, to make a nautical reconnaissance of the Shores and Ports of the Promontory of Cape Canseau, to ascertain the most proper point or Port therein for the junction of sea and land communication between Great Britain and British North America, with reference to a former Report of mine (in November last) on this subject to Your Excellency.

In the first instance we did not stop to examine Country Harbour, conceiving that point, 1st. as too remote from the N. E. extremity of Nova Scotia, or the nearest point on this Continent to Great Britain and Ireland ; and 2d. that its external dangers, with the distance of pilotage water, were irremediable obstacles to its unobstructed approach in fogs, however safe and convenient the Port might be in other respects. The Columbia entered and reconnoitred Torbay, and found similar objections to its adoption.

On Sunday, 2d August, she entered Whitehaven, by the western channel, and as it appeared at first view to offer all that could be required, I directed Lieut. Shortland to survey the approaches, and report to me his opinion on those and the Port itself, which Report I enclose for Your Excellency's information. We found the Haven to be a splendid and convenient Port, as capacious as Halifax Harbour, between George's Island and Bedford Basin, and as safe and commodious, and its approaches safe, and under any circumstances easily attainable from the open sea, and within the extreme points in perfect shelter and security, not being more than a mile of pilotage water ; but the shaft or channel to the Haven itself, although well sheltered and safe, yet is very narrow in some places, for a distance from one to two miles, according to the channel by which entered. Mr Shortland's plan shows all the dangers we could discover.

The Haven finishes to the northward at Pleasant River, also very convenient and navigable for two miles by Vessels of any burden, and for small craft two

miles further still, to its head, which northern extremity is only four miles from the high Road between Guysborough and the Port of Canseau.

Whitehead Island, the outer point to seaward of the Haven, is one hundred and forty feet high, and may be considered as the northeast extremity of Nova Scotia, and the nearest available point of this Continent to the British Islands, although itself isolated. The Acadian French Settlement of Molasses Harbour, is separated to the westward by a very narrow Isthmus of mere beach from the western part of the Haven, besides which there are not now more than eight or ten establishments around Whitehaven.

Well arranged Light Houses and Fog Signals will be as necessary to the Port of Whitehaven as to other Ports that are much frequented. Under all circumstances and at all times a Light House on Whitehead Island will be extremely well situated for all this coast, and might be seen seven leagues. For the Port of Whitehaven, one Harbour Light on Beacon Ledge would serve for all three of the principal entrances, and Fog Signals might be so arranged as to lead a Vessel safely through any of them in fogs.

Our inquiries relative to ice in Winter were very satisfactory. Pleasant River is generally frozen all down to the Haven in January and February, and in severe Winters the Haven has been known to be entirely frozen over, but only once known to have happened to the southward of Fisherman's Island, and the nature of the Coast and entrances preclude the possibility of packed or drift ice accumulating, so that the ingress and egress is always free and open.

It is not more or less subject to Fogs than the whole of this southeast Coast of Nova Scotia, which is all seriously inconvenienced by this impediment to comfortable navigation; and the soundings, with attention, may always give sufficient indication of approach; and the rocky ledges of the coast form an almost continued steep barrier of land.

It will not be necessary in this Report to explain the arrangements that may be required to facilitate the safe entrance of this Port from sea in fogs; it is sufficient to say, that it will admit the use of definite signals, to secure at all times a safe and easy entrance.

I forward to Your Excellency a trace of Lieutenant Shortland's survey of the main shaft of communication, from the sea to the Haven, shewing the three principal passages within the anchorage, which is all safe and commodious. There are, for the convenience of small craft, four or five other small passages from the sea, on whose critical examination we gave no time.

The northern shores of the Haven are everywhere safely approached, and capable of maintaining good wharves, &c.

Having satisfied myself of the eligibility of Whitehaven, we proceeded on the 6th August, coasting and reconnoitering towards Cranberry Island Light House, off Cape Canseau, five leagues from Whitehead Island. We passed Raspberry Island and Harbour, Whale Island, and Big Dover Harbour and Bay, Little Dover or White Point, St. Andrew's Island or Cape Canseau proper, and entered Canseau Harbour, of old the winter rendezvous of the French Navy in these seas, found most of these misnamed on the Charts; and nowhere, any spot, bay, or point, that could at all compete with Whitehaven, the approaches to all being difficult and dangerous in fogs or by night.

The Port of Canseau is very small, and is undergoing serious changes for want of care. The spot called Burying Island is in great part washed away, and soon will all of it be so, if not protected.

The approach to it is intricate and confined; and finding, moreover, that in every Spring, the Port of Canseau, and indeed all the Bay of Chedabucto, are seriously obstructed by drift ice out of the St. Lawrence, we merely measured the distance from the Light House to the outer Bases, and obtained proper

marks for the dangers in the direct route, and then left Canseau by the little Gut, for Guysboro', where Captain Pipon, the Commissioner, had made an appointment to meet me, and who, seeing us from heights, came on board from Fox Island, as we were passing, and we passed on to Guysboro' on the 8th August, an appropriate point for the junction of the sea route with a Rail Road or land communication, on any point of the shores of Chedabucto Bay, and the approach from sea is simple, safe, and easy; but it is so incommoded every Spring by drift ice, as to render it useless at that season for the purpose in question.

Having determined to return to Halifax, and to pass through all the sea-points with Captain Pipon on board, to enable him to see with his own eyes every one of them that could be brought in question, therefore we quitted Guysboro' on the 11th early, stopped at the Port of Canseau, where Captain Pipon landed to reconnoitre, for some hours, when he reembarked. We left Canseau and coasted the outer dangers to Whitehaven, which we entered by the eastern channel. Captain Pipon from two hills reconnoitered, and we remained in the Haven until next morning the 12th August, when we quitted Whitehaven by the western channel, coasted Torbay, and proceeded along shore to Country Harbour, the channel into which is long, intricate, and in some places shallow, therefore not at all recommendable; nor is the western or open sea-approach unobjectionable, on account of its numerous outlying dangers for nearly three leagues; and the place itself appeared to me too far removed from the northeast extremity of Nova Scotia, as before said. In the afternoon we landed Captain Pipon seven miles up the beautiful and navigable River of Country Harbour, and proceeded to Halifax in the *Columbia*. We put into *Marie et Josef* in a fog on 13th, and on 14th coasted the outer dangers with very foggy weather, and arrived at Halifax at 9 P. M. on the 14th.

I have the honor, &c.

W. F. W. OWEN, Captain, R. N.

His Excellency Sir W. M. G. Colebrooke, K. H.
Lieut. Governor.

(Copy)

COLUMBIA, *Halifax, N. S.*, 27th August, 1846.

SIR,—In pursuance of your orders, I have made a rough sketch of the inner part of the entrance of Whitehaven, which, with the accompanying remarks, I beg to submit for your consideration.

In fine clear weather, and by daylight, the approach to Whitehaven is easy, the shores being bold and no out-lying dangers, if we except two rocks nearly a mile distant from the shores of White Island, one to the S.W., and the other to the S.E. These generally break and so show themselves.

White Island forms the turning point of the shore of Nova Scotia, as it deflects towards the northward to Canseau. The white rocks, and its elevation of 140 feet, make it stand out prominently and easily distinguish it.

There are several channels into Whitehaven. Three can be used by Steamers of any size. The middle, which is between White Island and the ledges to its westward, appears to be the best, is about 250 fathoms broad in its narrowest part, and carries bold water on both sides, and is besides the shortest and most direct, not exceeding half a mile in length. However, as the directions of the channels differ, and all radiate nearly from the same point, a sailing vessel can use that most favorable with respect to the winds. The western is also a very good channel, and is preferable for vessels going or coming from that direction. The soundings without this Harbour are (near the shore) very irregular, especially in the approach to the eastern channel, which is also injured for vessels of large

draft of water, by a rocky patch with 13 or 14 feet water; it is situated near the entrance, and rather more than one third across channel from the small Island (Grassy Patch) off White Island.

When inside the Harbour care must be taken, as there are several shoal rocky patches (see Plan) which render the navigation difficult to strangers, and require to be well determined and buoyed, should the Harbour be used for commercial purposes. There is an abundance of safe anchorage, with good holding ground, black muddy bottom, land-locked, and perfectly smooth.

In foggy weather this Harbour is difficult of approach, especially to a stranger, as the soundings in shore are very irregular, and I have not been able to learn any good indications of its vicinity to be gathered from the lead, so as to render its approach by that means certain; and Torbay, its immediate neighbour to the westward, is a dangerous place to get into.

From the fishermen and small coasters I understand the currents round the point are uncertain, and generally depend upon the wind, though the prevailing current is to the westward.

I experienced the current in a boat when I visited the outer break; it was then setting to the westward at the rate of one and a-half mile per hour at least. I also perceived vessels in the offing setting rapidly in the same direction; the breeze was from the eastward and light, though it had previously blown hard from the same point. We also, in our passage from Halifax to Canseau, during a fog, with the wind from the S.W., experienced an easterly current; but the land once made, the Harbour is easily attained, especially by a Steamer.

A judicious arrangement of Fog Signals, and Light Houses, with buoys on the principal dangers, and a good survey, with the sea soundings well laid down, would make the approach in the night or during fogs attended with small danger to a careful seaman.

Latitude of Observation Rock, Whitehaven, 45° 14' 0" N.

Longitude " " " 61° 11' 4" W.

Variation 21° 42' 20" W. Rise of Tide from 3 to 6 feet. High water at the change of the Moon, 7h. 40m.

In the Admiralty Plan of this place, the general features and soundings appear correct, if we except some of the inner dangers, which are not noticed; but the scale is discrepant. I have the honor, &c.

(Signed)

P. FRED. SHORTLAND,
Lieut. and Commander.

The Hon. W. F. W. Owen, Captain, R.N.

H. M. S. COLUMBIA, *Campo Bello*, 23d Sept. 1846.

SIR,—In referring to my Report of the 11th, principally showing Whitehaven to be a Port in every way calculated for the purpose designed, it has shown me that possibly there may have been some points neither so fully nor satisfactorily explained therein as might be considered desirable, and principally the deservedly high character of Halifax as a safe and convenient Port, has been not unfrequently adverted to by persons not very conversant with the details of minute navigation; implying that Halifax being so safe and secure a Port, it would not be prudent to establish another Port, and which could not fail to be detrimental to its local interests, (viz. of Halifax,) and could not on their assumed suppositions be either so safe or convenient. The comparative advantages of Halifax and Whitehaven must be in the first place decided by their respective Geographical positions, which is proved to be so much to the advantage of Whitehaven, (in the only view

here taken of them) that the communications between Great Britain and Halifax (itself) would be accelerated at least twelve hours under any circumstances, and under some circumstances possibly by twice, or even thrice that difference of time.

This fact must be decisive in the mere Geographical comparison. In the second place, comparing the two points nautically, Halifax is a good, capacious, fine, safe harbour; so is Whitehaven, and in nothing that I know, inferior to Halifax.

In clear weather, by night or by day, both are equally available, and equally safe and easy of approach, so that the only circumstance still open to comparison, is in the too common case that at the time when entrance is sought into them respectively, all the points and the ship herself may be enveloped in a dense fog, and possibly her own jibboom-end not visible—the most perplexing and appalling case in precise navigation to seamen.

In case of fog, the attainment of Halifax Harbour requires twenty miles of pilotage navigation; for Whitehaven, never more than three or four; and the last is also more surely beacons; in truth, in the case of fogs, Halifax is difficult, and with the loose management of modern navigators, it is dangerous; in proof of which, it is a well known fact, that ships of war and others are sometimes detained outside the Harbour from half a day to three days before they can effect a sure and safe entrance, and serious delay to the Packets frequently occurs; besides, the known fact that one of these (the *Britannia*) once narrowly escaped wreck with serious damage among the dangers of Sambro, at the entrance of Halifax, near six leagues from the Port, and which must always be passed before that can be attained; and no longer ago than the middle of July last, the same vessel overshoot the entrance to Halifax, and very narrowly escaped wreck, with serious damage, among rocks and ledges thirty miles beyond it, about Jeddore.

Both places must be subject to the casualties and accidents arising from mismanagement; but the field of occult movements, (in fogs) and the sphere of uncertainty in the navigation, is full ten times greater at Halifax than Whitehaven.

At the latter I could pledge myself to direct vessels as surely and certainly to any spot within its precincts, in fogs, as by a human voice in a boat ahead of and guiding them. Nevertheless, Halifax is by no means incapable of such arrangements for foggy weather, although no such attempt hitherto can be said to have been made, and they would there also be required on a much more extensive scale than at Whitehaven.

I have, &c.

(Signed)

W. F. W. OWEN, *Captain, R. N.*

His Excellency Sir Wm. Colebrooke, K.H.,
Lieutenant Governor.